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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a pilot study of University of Illinois at Chicago faculty members, their assistants who use the library for them, and the role of the Library of the Health Sciences in that process. The Library of the Health Sciences public services staff members, College of Pharmacy faculty, and their assistants were interviewed. The questions for each group were designed based on the responses of the previous group. Although the faculty and assistants were very satisfied with the help they routinely received from the library staff, their responses indicated a need for more formalized communication pertaining to library resources and services. They also indicated a need for a reassessment of the location of certain reference materials in the multi-site library system. As a result of the access limitations of this type of system, the faculty had supplemented the library services and resources by obtaining personal access to vital tools and by utilizing other information resources within the medical center complex. It is recommended that the library conduct a broad-based assessment of reference services usage by the faculty outside the library. The survey instruments for the library services staff, faculty, and their assistants are included. (6 references)
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PILOT STUDY: LIBRARY USE AND LIBRARY SKILLS OF RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a pilot study of University of Illinois at Chicago faculty members, their assistants who use the library for them, and the role of the Library of the Health Sciences in that process. The Library of the Health Sciences public services staff members, College of Pharmacy faculty, and their assistants were interviewed. The questions for each group were designed based on the responses of the previous group. Although the faculty and assistants were very satisfied with the help they routinely received from the library staff, their responses indicated a need for more formalized communication pertaining to library resources and services. They also indicated a need for a reassessment of the location of certain reference materials in the multi-site library system. As a result of the access limitations of this type of system, the faculty had supplemented the library services and resources by obtaining personal access to vital tools and by utilizing other information resources within the medical center complex. This study recommends that the library conduct a broad-based assessment of reference services usage, faculty resource needs, and the resources available to and utilized by the faculty outside the library.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a description of a pilot project conducted at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The focus of the study was the assistants who use the library for faculty members and how the assistants are trained. The information obtained was intended to be used to determine what the library was or could be doing to serve this group better. The results of this study provided the library with in-depth information about the faculty and research assistants in the College of Pharmacy, including their needs, perceptions of the library and its services, and some of their patterns of library use. This research project offers suggestions for additional study of the assistants who came to the library to perform work for the faculty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the amount of literature on bibliographic instruction is great, a search of the literature revealed very little on the training of faculty assistants who use the library. Several library orientation programs have been developed for research assistants, secretaries, and laboratory assistants who come to the library for faculty members. The programs described in the literature vary in content and structure. Only one of the papers reviewed

directly studied these patrons to determine their needs and skills prior to establishing a library orientation program. Another paper described how follow-up surveys were used to determine the content for additional library courses. Most of the papers described several types of post-program evaluations.

D. J. White considered it essential to determine the needs of the University of Victoria allied health sciences staff before developing a library use course. He determined the content of the course by assessing the questions received from the allied health staff at the reference desk for the two years prior to developing the course. However, this methodology was not described in detail. [1]

C. A. Mularski and P. S. Bradigan did not describe how they determined the content of the Ohio State University health sciences library orientation workshop. They did describe an extensive post workshop evaluation procedure designed to improve the program and determine content for a more advanced library instruction workshop. The evaluation consisted of two parts: an evaluation form completed immediately after the workshop and a survey sent to the participants as a long-term follow-up. The evaluation and follow-up survey helped Mularski and Bradigan develop more comprehensive and effective workshops [2].

The content of R. K. Poyer's library orientation program was based on his experience in teaching library skills courses to a variety of students in health care fields such as dentistry and nursing. He also used a basic outline of topics from a similar orientation course at another institution. He grouped participants together according to their status (secretary, laboratory assistant, etc.) and their knowledge of the library as determined by a pretest. [3]

The orientation program described by D. Taylor is a revision of a former program at the University of Texas, San Antonio. As part of the former program, class members completed evaluation forms. The class members' suggestions aided in structuring a new program. The library also received "input from the university's Training Office." The paper did not describe the reevaluation process or any type of formal study performed prior to developing the initial program. [4]

The other papers reviewed contained no empirical studies of library users. E. Borda and M. E. Murray based their curriculum on the library staff's experience with users. [5] W. Maina simply designed a program with the goal of giving the "enrollees the information they needed to do simple library tasks efficiently on their own." [6]

An evaluation of the programs was considered an essential step in improving the content and structure of existing library instruction courses. Most of the evaluations consisted of forms given out at the end of the instruction periods. A variety of methods were used to determine the content of the different orientation programs, but only White did a direct study of his patrons.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology consisted of interviewing library staff, Pharmacy faculty, and their assistants in small groups or over the telephone. Library staff were interviewed first, Pharmacy faculty second, and the assistants last. One group's responses were used to develop the next group's questions.

The interviews of the Library of the Health Science's public services staff included nine present staff and one former staff member. They were from the Information Services, Government Documents, and Serials departments. Both librarians and Library Technical Assistants were interviewed in small group interviews lasting approximately one hour.

The purpose of these interviews was to identify the library staff's perspective on three items: the status of the individuals performing the library tasks for the faculty; the nature of these tasks; and the problems the assistants may be having with the library.

The next set of interviews was of faculty members in the University of Illinois' College of Pharmacy. Six faculty members were interviewed in two groups with each session lasting approximately one-hour. The purpose of these interviews was to define the faculty's hiring practices, to define the assistants' duties, and to determine the faculty's expectations of their assistants. Also, the faculty were queried about how they trained their assistants.

Finally, the assistants were interviewed. Three graduate students and one laboratory technician were interviewed over the telephone in approximately thirty-minute interviews. The assistants had between three and fifteen years of experience. The purpose was to find out how and where they gained their experience and what problems they had using the library.

LIBRARY STAFF INTERVIEWS

The library staff identified the assistants as secretaries, clerical workers, research assistants, graduate assistants, and laboratory assistants. They were seen as having varying educational backgrounds and academic experiences. The assistants were also seen as having limited formal training in the use of the Library of the Health Sciences. However, one staff member described them as "not any worse than anybody else" in their use of the library.

The library staff was questioned as to what skills they could reasonably expect from the assistants and how the assistants should be trained. The staff's expectations were not very high. The library staff tries to provide swift service with very little training to the secretarial or clerical employees, because staff view this group as infrequent users who do not need

to know as much about how to use the library as the research, graduate, or laboratory assistants. The expectations were higher for this group, because they are directly involved in the research process. The library staff would like all assistants to be able to understand simple citation practices and be able to distinguish between book and journal article citations.

Also, the library staff was asked what information might help them serve the assistants better. The staff responded that they wanted to know the backgrounds of the assistants and how they are trained. They also wanted to know the ways in which different types of assistants were used to perform different tasks in the library, for instance, whether a secretary or a research assistant is sent to request computer searches.

There are several limitations to this type of questioning. The library staff was only able to give information about the patrons who approached them. Patrons are not asked to identify their statuses to the Information Services staff, and some staff members were not willing to make assumptions or generalizations about patrons who had not identified themselves. Also, the library staff was asked to recall encounters with a patron group that they had not previously isolated as a group. The staff had to be reminded often to focus only on this group, as they tended to stray into discussions concerning patrons in general.

FACULTY INTERVIEWS

The faculty members said that they send well-trained graduate students and research assistants to the library to do their library work. These individuals are hired primarily for their subject knowledge or interests, rather than their library skills. Faculty members expect these assistants to need training. They are trained to use the reference tools of their field in elective courses and by their faculty advisors or employers. Their library training is viewed as an integral part of their training as future researchers, not as a separate experience.

Regarding which assistants are asked to perform which tasks, the faculty members make their job assignments based on an evaluation of three different factors--the task, the assistant, and the library. Different faculty members had differing levels of trust in regard to each of these factors. When asked what percentage of their library work they have their assistants perform, the range was none to 100%. The response of "none" seemed to be based on the belief that it was more efficient and thorough to do one's own library work. In other words, there seemed to be the belief that there was no way to know for certain at what point a task might become too difficult or too important for the assistant. The 100% response was also based on a value of efficiency. This individual feared that if he himself went to the library, he would become involved in a three to four hour process. This individual also tried to surround himself with as much information as possible. This included acquiring

preprints and a personal computer version of Current Contents. He spoke several times of the fact that there was just too much information for any one person to digest.

The faculty members who do entrust assistants with their library work send them to the library to perform all types of tasks, except the task of citation evaluation. Several mentioned that they review all bibliographies generated by their assistants, either through computer searches or paper base sources, and choose which ones are worth photocopying. This decision to reserve citation evaluation for themselves seems to be one of economy of time, paper, and money. This is also seen as an opportunity to provide a necessary lesson for the assistants in how to evaluate citations and abstracts.

These differing responses can be viewed as being based on individual values, priorities, and levels of trust. The fact that all faculty feel that their assistants are not capable of evaluating the usefulness of citations leads to the conclusion that this is the highest level task s/he could entrust to an assistant.

If the faculty member trusts the assistant to perform the task, s/he trusts the library staff to assist them when necessary. There was a consensus that all human services requested in the library are performed satisfactorily. There are three ways the library plays a part in this process. One is in the area of direct and immediate service; for example, if the assistant requests help using the library's online catalog, s/he receives it from the library staff. This as noted was reviewed positively.

Another part the library plays in the process is that of providing efficient access to necessary materials. The faculty was concerned about a library collection development policy that resulted in decreased duplication of certain materials in the Library of the Health Sciences and the Science Library. As is true of other large university campuses, the Health Sciences campus is located some distance from the Main campus and its libraries. The Pharmacy faculty did not consider access to the Science Library, located ten blocks away, to be reasonable access to necessary materials.

Another role of the library is to train users to use the resources. Faculty members did not seem to have an appreciation of this role. When asked whether or not they had sent their assistants to any of the library's classes or seminars, most responded that they were unaware that such classes and seminars existed. One individual made a point to go to the library and to ask for a schedule of classes. He also recommended the CD-ROM workshop to his assistants. The faculty feels strongly that such courses would be worthwhile and expressed a willingness to send their assistants.

Many of the problems the faculty members have with the library point to a broader problem--communication. They did not know about courses and they were not aware of the library services available over the mainframe computer. They seemed unaware of whom to contact to request books or journals or to discuss problems they were having with the collection. There is an obvious need for the library to reach out to this department. They mentioned having used several other resource centers instead of the Library, for instance, the Drug

Information Center in the hospital. They also mentioned purchasing their own tools to fill their information needs. This is sometimes necessary in the best of situations, but the library needs to be aware of these supplementary information sources and be able to evaluate its patrons use of these sources.

There were several limitations to this interview process which must be considered when evaluating the results. Direct questioning of faculty members by library faculty members may have kept the interviews from being as negatively critical as an anonymous survey might have allowed. They were also asked to evaluate direct services when they may not go to the library themselves. Their perceptions may be important, but the evaluations must be tempered with the realization that their experience is secondhand. There was also another problem with the group interview. Besides the problem of some faculty members being stronger at communicating their ideas than others, there was the problem of rank. If one individual were beneath another in the academic structure, s/he might not be willing to oppose her/his superior.

Another limitation was that of sample selection. These departments may or may not exemplify the types of information seeking behavior of the users of the Library of the Health Sciences. The sample was too small to make this determination and did not represent the departments that use the library to support their clinical responsibilities.

ASSISTANTS INTERVIEWS

The assistants learned many of their library skills on their own or through their undergraduate coursework. Only one graduate student said that her faculty supervisor gave her any library instruction, and this was specific to her field. They learned how to use the library computer systems individually with the help of library-produced handouts.

A few of the graduate assistants stated that they had attended library workshops on the MEDLINE CD-ROM. A few others intended to attend future MEDLINE workshops. These people all learned of the workshops through advertisements posted at the library.

The assistants had a problem with the relocation of some journals and reference sources to the Science Library, but they reported using the Science Library when necessary. One graduate assistant found searching difficult on the online catalog and would like more training on the system.

All, except one person, would attend a library instruction seminar specifically designed for research assistants. They feel that it should only be one hour, and it should deal with specific library tools in their field. They wanted to know more about the online catalog, MEDLINE, CD-ROM products, and reference sources in pharmacy and chemistry.

The methods used in these interviews contained some limitations. The sample size of this group was small, thus not all of the types of assistants identified were questioned. These assistants had needs which were at a higher level than originally anticipated based on the information gathered in the library staff interviews. Also, their library skills should have been tested to determine their skill level, especially the laboratory technician who infrequently used the library's computer facilities.

CONCLUSION

The original intent of this study was to ascertain the needs and skills of faculty assistants who use the Library of the Health Sciences for faculty members. In the interviews with library staff, faculty members, and their assistants, a split became apparent between the library staff's point of view of the process and the faculty and assistants' views. The library staff evaluated the skills of the assistants based on the assistants' questions posed at the library service points. This led to an analysis of perceived problems that did not agree with the perceptions of the faculty and their assistants.

The faculty reported general satisfaction with their assistants performance and the assistants reported a high level of confidence in their ability to use the library effectively. The library staff and faculty differed in their statements of who did library work for faculty. There was a consensus of the staff that clerical and secretarial staff were performing some of these tasks and having difficulties, but the faculty never reported using their clerical or secretarial staff in this manner. The interviews of the faculty and their assistants shed more light on the process of how this type of library work is conducted and of what the library's role is in that process.

In the role of providing immediate service, the library staff agreed that they tried to provide quick and correct answers to those questions posed by people performing another's library work. They noted that they do not make an attempt to provide user education to these individuals, unless the individual requests it and may return to the library again to use the same tool. Another variable in the decision to instruct a patron is that of time--how much they have and how much the patron is willing to spend of hers/his. In this role of immediate service, the faculty and the assistants evaluated the library very positively.

In terms of training, the library staff made note of the fact that the assistants do not attend the training sessions in significant numbers. However, the library workshop attendees do not identify their statuses, so it is difficult to tell whether one is doing his or her own research or working for faculty. The library staff noted that they would be willing to arrange for any type of instruction requested either by the faculty or the assistants. Though the faculty embraced the idea of library training, they did not report

having made use of the already existing training programs. The assistants seemed unaware of and uninterested in the existing training sessions, except for the ones on the use of MEDLINE and the CD-ROM.

In the role of providing necessary materials to the patrons with efficient and effective access to them, the library staff concentrated on its evaluation in the area of systems access. They noted that there are many patrons who ask questions about how to locate an item in the collection. These patrons show little understanding of how and when the systems can help them locate that information. The faculty and assistants interviews bear this out. They did not view their lack of use and understanding of the library systems as an impediment to their finding the information they required. The indexes and the journal holdings list seemed to be their entre to the collection, since they are heavy users of the journal collection, and it is generally shelved in alphabetical order. Both groups were unaware that the journal holdings list is no longer being maintained and that they will have to use the systems to ascertain current journal information.

In the role of the provision of necessary materials, the library staff did not evaluate the library's performance, but the other two groups did. This was the main problem these groups had with their use of the library. Their particular concern was the collection development policy of reducing duplication of materials in the different campus libraries. This was not perceived as reasonable access to necessary materials. This may be a characteristic of this college, whose interests overlap those of the science departments, but further study must be conducted in order to determine the extent of this problem.

At the center of all of the problems cited by the faculty and the assistants was a lack of awareness of what services the library offered, how the systems worked, and what effect they could have on the library's role in the process. This lack of awareness can be traced to a lack of communication. Communication can raise the faculty's awareness of present training sessions and online services and systems. Communication can also raise the library's awareness of the department's needs in regard to materials and access.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These communication problems can be solved by actively seeking faculty input through a formal outreach program. The existing services and training sessions can be better publicized through direct departmental mailings to specific individuals. Several faculty members noted that they referred to the new books/journals titles list that was published in the discontinued library newsletter. Information concerning campus computer center systems is being publicized in a newsletter developed recently by the Computing Center and the Library. This effort was remarked upon by some of the faculty members.

Besides improving communication with the users, the library could better serve the needs of its users by becoming more aware of and establishing closer ties with other information services on the campus and in the area. Several faculty members mentioned using a Drug Information Center located in the hospital and the Illinois State Psychiatric Institute Library. The library also needs to be more aware of less formal information sources on the campus and in the clinics, such as which faculty have access to departmental collections.

Future user studies need to be conducted and this study provides some insight into what and who needs to be studied and how. If a training program is to be designed for assistants who use the library for faculty members, a user study should be conducted in the form of a survey distributed and collected at the direct service points in both the Library of the Health Sciences and the Science Library. Some effort should be made to discern whether or not those seeking help in the library are affiliated with the institution. Though a count is presently kept at the reference desk, every patron is not directly queried as to her/his affiliation.

If a broader view of the faculty's use of the Library is to be obtained, a more carefully constructed sample of faculty members from different departments should be interviewed. These interviews need to be conducted in the form of phone appointments, and the questions should be designed to gather quantifiable results.

Surveying patron needs is a difficult, elaborate, and dynamic process, but it is required in order to provide efficient and effective services in a time of budget constraints and limited staffing. This study isolated several areas for future study and assessment that should assist this library in its goal to improve services for all its users.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMATION SERVICES QUESTIONS

1. Can you identify users who are seeking information for others? Do you see the same ones? If you see the same ones, do they ask the same questions or do their skills improve allowing them to work more independently?
2. Do they identify themselves as employees and state that "my Boss wants ..." or "Dr. Smith sent me to find ... "?
3. What types of people do you see, for instance, secretaries, laboratory assistants, or graduate assistants?
4. How do you evaluate the skills of each group?
5. Do they use and understand correct citation practices, indexes, serials lists, abbreviations, etc.?
6. Do they use and understand computer systems and online systems in general? Do they use and understand our systems?
7. Do they understand their employers' needs or do they ask questions that are stated verbatim from their employer? For example, do they ask for a particular journal when what may be needed is a subject listing of the journals in the field?
8. Do they attend any information services workshops? If so, which ones?

9. Do you refer them to other departments (government documents, etc.)?
10. Do they return to say the answer they got was or was not the one their employers wanted?
11. What information would help you improve your service to this group?
12. What skills do you think can be reasonably expected of this group?
13. What training do you think they should receive and who should do it?

APPENDIX B

FACULTY QUESTIONS

1. Whom do you send to the library?
2. When hiring an assistant, do you take library skills into consideration?
How important is this?
3. What types of activities do they do in the library and who performs each activity?
EXAMPLES:
 - a. Photocopy articles from citations
 - b. Find books to checkout from citations
 - c. Select citations from indexes
 - d. Create bibliographies
 - e. Request computer searches
4. How much of your library work do you depend on your assistants to do?
5. How satisfied are you with the results of your assistants' library work?

6. Have your assistants ever reported having spoken with a library staff member?
7. What specific problems have your assistants encountered in using the library?
8. Did you ever send an assistant back to the library when you were not satisfied with the results of his/her work? If so, why?
9. Have you ever spoken directly with a library staff member when your assistant did not return with what you had requested?
10. Do you have access to ADN in your office or department?

Have you ever used LUIS, the Library's computer catalog, on the ADN?

Have you ever used LCS, the state-wide circulation system, on the ADN?

Have you ever used LIBMAIL, the library's electronic mailbox on the ADN?

Have your assistants ever been trained to use LUIS, LCS, or LIBMAIL on the ADN?

11. Are your assistants trained to use the library? If so, by whom?
12. Do you send them to workshops in the library? If so, which ones?
13. Would you like to see a library orientation program for your assistants?
If so, what would you like covered in an orientation program? How
much time would you allow for training?
14. Have you ever sent assistants to other departments or libraries to
check citations, check out materials, request searches? If so, why
and where?
15. What expectations do you have of the Library regarding your
assistants?
16. May we interview your assistants and if so may we have their names,
phone numbers?

APPENDIX C

ASSISTANTS QUESTIONS

1. What is your current position?
2. How long have you worked in this position?
3. What library training did you get from your advisor?
 - a. use of indexes (which ones?)
 - b. use of specific reference books (which ones?)
 - c. how to read and find citations
 - d. how to find conference proceedings
 - e. use of LUIS
 - f. use of LCS
 - g. use of CD-ROM Index Medicus
 - h. how to fill out ILL requests
 - i. library policies
4. What library use training did you get in your courses?
 - a. use of indexes (which ones?)
 - b. use of specific reference books (which ones?)
 - c. how to read and find citations
 - d. how to find conference proceedings
 - e. use of LUIS
 - f. use of LCS
 - g. use of CD-ROM Index Medicus
 - h. how to fill out ILL requests
 - i. library policies
5. What problems have you encountered when performing library research for your advisor?
 - a. materials checked out or missing
 - b. materials not held by the library
 - c. photocopy machine problems
 - d. citations you cannot understand
 - e. incomplete instructions or information from your advisor
 - f. not able to locate items
 - g. not understanding indexes

- h. not knowing how to use LUIS or LCS
- i. not knowing general library policy
- j. others

6. Have you ever attended any of the library's orientation programs?

If so, which ones?

- a. CD-ROM
- b. LUIS
- c. Medline Training
- d. Library Tours
- e. others

7. How did you find out about these programs?

- a. Notices posted in the library
- b. From your advisor
- c. Library staff
- d. Notices posted elsewhere
- e. other places

8. How helpful were they?

- a. not at all
- b. a little
- c. somewhat
- d. a lot

9. Would you attend a library orientation seminar specifically for research assistants?

10. What information would you like included in this type of seminar?

- a. use of indexes (which ones?)
- b. use of specific reference books (which ones?)
- c. how to read and find citations
- d. how to find conference proceedings
- e. use of LUIS
- f. use of LCS
- g. use of CD-ROM Index Medicus
- h. how to fill out ILL requests
- i. library policies